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METAPHOR AND HIERARCHY IN MAORI SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Man Be My Metaphor (Dylan Thomas)

Ethnographic analysis of inter-cultural circumstances is by definition characterized by the interpretation and translation of emic concepts and customs into the etic language of anthropology. Over the past three decades it has become increasingly clear that metaphors play a central role in language, thought and action (Lakoff and Johnsson 1980), which implies that ethnographic practices often involve the substitution of anthropological tropes for indigenous metaphors. The relatively new tropological perspective on language suggests furthermore that metaphors not only govern language, but also constitute realities to the extent that they are created and organised through language (Fernandez 1986, Quinn 1991, Rumsey 2004). This insight is particularly significant since many metaphors used in anthropology, such as gender, the self, or hierarchy, are examples of catachresis, that is metaphors which have no adequate referents (Moore 1997: 140). The conclusion to be drawn for the practice of ethnography is therefore that ethnographic representations (re-)construct realities by means of metaphors that may evoke associations that are fundamentally different from the associations that are evoked by the metaphors underlying indigenous languages and practices (e.g. Fox 1980, Salmond 1982, Fernandez 1991, Keen 1995).

In this paper I shall argue that conventional anthropological interpretations of the structure of hierarchy in Maori socio-political organisation are misleading to the extent that they replace indigenous metaphors expressing kinship and leadership. When instead Maori tropes are taken as point of departure for ethnographic analysis, the anthropological model of hierarchy in socio-political organisation is rather different. My contention will be that the ambiguity in Maori hierarchy has long been misunderstood because New Zealand was routinely situated within typologies of leadership developed for the Polynesian region as a whole, as distinct from other culture areas in the Pacific, such as Melanesia and Micronesia. These typologies are based on the models of conical clan and ramage, which are rooted in metaphors suggesting that the segmentary stratification of both kinship and leadership in Polynesia was streamlined in a unilineal manner, either from the top downwards or from

the bottom upwards. Since Maori socio-political organisation is constituted through metaphors of births and growth, however, it seems more appropriate to understand hierarchy as generated from within rather than from the outside, from above or from below. Thus, I aim at making a contribution to the extensive debate on leadership in New Zealand and the Pacific at large (e.g. Feinberg 2002).

Leadership in the Pacific

The comparative analysis of leadership in the Pacific is deeply rooted within the distinction between the so-called culture areas of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. The idea that some peoples in the Pacific are more alike than others was first introduced by Captain James Cook in the 1770s, but it was not until 1832 that the terms Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia were coined by a French Captain named Jules Dumont d'Urville. The distinction between these areas was not simply geographic, but it was largely based on social and cultural criteria, one of which concerned political organisation. Polynesians were believed to share a certain degree of civilization as reflected, among other things, in a chiefly organisation and a hierarchical structure of rank. As such, they were considered to be opposed to the 'tribal' Melanesians who were regarded as much more 'savage' (Dumont d'Urville 1832: 4-5, 11-12).

Although the division between three culture areas in the Pacific continues to guide the study of the region (e.g. Crocombe 2001: 146-7; Lal & Fortune 2000: 63), the widespread distinction between Polynesia and Melanesia in particular has also been the subject of debate since at least 25 years (e.g. Guiart 1981). One of the most interesting contributions to this debate was made by Nicholas Thomas (1989a), who linked the stereotypical characterization of the respective regions to the way they were valued and ranked in relation to each other by Europeans. This must be understood against the background of eighteenth and nineteenth century preoccupations with hierarchy, hereditary leadership, priesthood and power. Obviously, these had also influenced Dumont d'Urville for in his perspective Polynesian forms of hierarchy were associated with aristocracy and bore unequivocally a positive connotation. At the same time, Melanesian tribal organizations were associated with anarchy and disorder, which led him to characterise Melanesian societies in terms of what they were not, in terms of what they were missing, namely a hierarchical socio-political organisation.

These stereotypical characterizations of Polynesia and Melanesia are based on the view that social equality and inequality are to be measured in quantitative terms, as *more* or *less* hierarchical. For that reason, too, the relation

between Polynesia and Melanesia has often been equated with the relation between hierarchy and equality. On the basis of this relation of equivalence anthropologists and others have long characterized different groups in Polynesia and Melanesia in terms of the presence or absence of hierarchy or the centralization of leadership. Polynesian societies used to be characterized in terms of the presence of hierarchy, while supposed forms of egalitarianism in Melanesia were explained in terms of the absence of ostensibly Polynesian features of chieftainship and socio-political stratification. Thus, according to Thomas (1989a: 34), characterization became typology, which also explains why the sophisticated analyses in studies of single societies have never been translated into a multilinear perspective on regional political systems.

The typology of the political systems of Polynesia and Melanesia was developed over the years, but in 1963 it was canonized in a publication by Marshall Sahlins, entitled 'Poor Man, Rich Man, Big Man, Chief'. In this influential article he refined the contrast between Polynesian hierarchy and Melanesian egalitarianism in terms of a characterization of the regions' leaders as 'chiefs' and 'big men'. Following this essay the contrast between Polynesia and Melanesia became soon epitomized with the labels 'ascribed status' versus 'achieved status', in spite of all exceptions and internal variations and combinations to which Sahlins had explicitly drawn attention. In the meantime, this *a priori* categorization of leadership systems has been criticized at great length: not all Polynesian societies can *a priori* be classified as characterized by chiefly leaders, whilst in some Melanesian societies hereditary forms of leadership (co-)exist with the 'big man' type (Douglas 1979, see also Godelier & Strathern 1991). Below I will qualify this typology for New Zealand, but what interests me here is the metaphor used by Sahlins to exemplify the contrast between Polynesia and Melanesia.

Sahlins (1963: 287) described the so-called tribal system characteristic of Melanesia as 'one of politically unintegrated segments', while for Polynesia he used the geometrical metaphor of a pyramid: 'the Polynesian polity is an extensive pyramid of groups capped by the family and following of a paramount chief'. To this he added that the development of Polynesian pyramids was facilitated by the so-called 'ranked lineages', that were found to represent the kinship systems in the region. He mentioned three terms that were commonly used with reference to the Polynesian lineage: 'status lineage', after Goldman (1957), 'ramage', after Firth (1957a [1936]), and 'conical clan', after Kirchhoff 1968 [1955]. In an earlier publication Sahlins (1958: 140, 248) already revealed that Kirchhoff's 'brilliant' discussion of clanship had provided him with a 'lead' in his project of ranking Polynesian societies in a

classification of the degree of stratification. Against that background the similarity between Sahlins' metaphor of 'pyramid' and Kirchhoff's concept of 'conical clan' is unlikely to be a mere coincidence. The notion of the conical clan not only influenced Sahlins typologies of Polynesia, but to some extent it became the prototypical model for socio-political organisation throughout the region (Hage & Harary 1996: 90). In spite of the widespread recognition that the conical clan represents the basic structural form of Polynesian societies it has rarely been discussed, which makes it necessary to elaborate on this important model and metaphor in more detail.

The Conical Clan

Kirchhoff wrote his seminal paper in 1935, but it was not published until 1955 when his graduate students printed it in the first issue of the *Davidson Journal of Anthropology*, that was discontinued after three years. The early date of writing is significant since it reveals that Kirchhoff was still firmly positioned in the evolutionary tradition of anthropology. He departed from a type of society in which the concept of descent was still absent. Blood bonds and marriage were only important within a small nucleus of near relatives, but at the level of community only sentimental ties played a role. In the course of evolutionary development economic activities increased, from hunting and gathering to agriculture, which made more cooperation necessary. Thus, kinship organisations emerged to ensure stability above the level of families.

Kirchhoff described the first type of kinship grouping emerging in the evolution of human society as clans, of which he distinguished two forms: the unilateral exogamous clan and the conical clan. The first was either patrilineal or matrilineal, but in both cases it was egalitarian: 'every member of the clan is, as far as clan membership goes, on an absolutely equal footing with the rest: the nearness of relation to each other or to some ancestor being of no consequence for a person's place in the clan' (Kirchhoff 1968: 375). On the long term Kirchhoff considered this type of clan as inadequate since its absolute egalitarianism made it incapable to intensify internal cooperation that would become necessary following the progression of economic and social differentiation.

The counterpart of this type of kinship group was described as the conical clan, in which members are not on an equal footing but distinguished in terms of 'nearness' of their 'relationship to the common ancestor of the group' (*ibid.* 377). This results in a kinship group 'in which every single member, except brothers and sisters, has a different standing: the concept of the *degree of relationship* leads to *different degrees of membership* in the clan. In other words, some are members to a higher degree than others' (*ibid.*). Kirchhoff

elaborated this organisational principle of the conical clan by pointing out that in these kinship groups leading social, political, economic and religious functions are reserved to those of highest descent, *i.e.* those closest to the ancestor of the clan, who is frequently regarded as a god, or, alternatively, as descended directly from divine, founding ancestors. The closer in descent to the sacred ancestor, the higher the opportunities in the evolving social and economic differentiation. Thus, some members of the clan may almost be gods or divine chiefs, while others further removed from the apex of the hierarchical organisation might even be slaves, although all continue to be considered as relatives. Since clan membership shades off the farther one is away from the top of the clan, Kirchhoff likened this type of kinship group to a 'cone': 'the whole tribes being one such cone, with the legendary ancestor at its top, - but within it are a larger or smaller number of similar cones, the top of each coinciding with or being connected with the top of the whole cone' (*ibid.* 378-9). This geometrical metaphor of a certain type of socio-political organisation later became the prototype for descent groups and political leadership in Polynesia.

Kirchhoff's paper was brief and lucid and therefore his typology of clanship had a tremendous appeal, even though it was recognized at an early stage that the usefulness of his dichotomy is rather limited for comparative research because in practice many kin-based societies only partially fulfil Kirchhoff's criteria for egalitarian or conical clans. Morton Fried (1957: 5), for example, argued that a basic error in Kirchhoff's approach was the reification of the contrast between egalitarian and hierarchical clans in his formulation of ideal types: 'To do as Kirchhoff has done – to attempt to make *all* apparent distinctions between egalitarian and stratified kin groups part of their definition – is to create, at best a tautology, and at worst to make a dogmatic and unacceptable hash of the study of comparative social institutions.'

The stereotypical character of Kirchhoff's classification made it unacceptable in some areas where the kingroup organisation did not neatly fit into his rigid distinction (e.g. Knight 1990), but in Polynesia it became one of the most influential models for the description of socio-political organisation throughout the region. Archaeologists and linguists view the conical clan as a central component of Ancestral Polynesian Society (Kirch 1984, Kirch and Green 2001, Pawley 1982). In his landmark study of evolution in Polynesian chiefdoms, the American archaeologist Patrick Kirch (1984: 31) for example, described the conical clan as 'the organizational basis of Polynesian societies'. In his view, the model of the conical clan was applicable to Polynesia since the principle of genealogical seniority entailed structurally equivalent gradations of rank between older and younger siblings, chiefs and commoners, and higher

and lesser lineages. In conical systems the chief is also believed to encompass the whole, while he himself is nearly always encompassed by a higher-order chief.

Another recent and influential interpretation of the conical clan in Polynesia has been authored by Jonathan Friedman and Michael Rowlands (1977; see also Friedman 1975), who associate it particularly with the circulation of prestige goods. Relations of descent and alliance are combined with network variables in an evolutionary model of social stratification. In this so-called 'prestige-good system' the difference between the clearly articulated regional hierarchies of western Polynesia and the devolved or fragmented polities of eastern Polynesia are attributed to the attenuation of exchange networks in the latter region. A characteristic feature of the economic regime of 'conical systems' was that exchange relations coincided with hierarchical encompassment and the movement of tribute towards the top, from which it was redistributed. This 'integrative' pattern of exchange was opposed to the 'agonistic' type of competitive exchange between political rivals, which was characteristic of the more materially productive devolved regimes, although Thomas (1989b: 93) has since argued that barter and ceremonial exchange were also well developed in devolved polities in eastern Polynesia (see also Gell 1993).

What all representations of the conical clan in Polynesia share is their common ancestry in the published dissertation of Marshall Sahlins on *Social Stratification in Polynesia* (1958). In this book Sahlins specified both the structure of ranking in the conical clan in Polynesia and the higher forms of economic cooperation referred to by Kirchhoff. The criterion of stratification in the descent group was described as 'distance from the senior line of descent from the common ancestor' (Sahlins 1958: 140), while two forms of economic cooperation were associated with the conical clan. First, the regulation of land tenure in which paramount chiefs owned the land but delegated management to lower ranking chiefs, who in turn allotted usufruct rights to commoners. Second, the regulation of production and exchange through a system of redistribution in which goods flowed up and down the hierarchy. To explain different forms of social and political organisation in Polynesia Sahlins adopted an ecological model of adaptive variation, regarding each form as an alternative solution to the problem of distributing surplus production as determined by a particular type of island environment.

The main argument of Sahlins' (1958: 250) early study was that differences in ecological environments explained productivity differences, which, in turn, could be linked to different gradations of stratification and

hierarchy: ‘the greater the productivity, the greater the amount of stratification’. This conclusion also led him to distinguish between nominal and nearly despotic authority of chiefs, although the conical clan appeared to be the dominant structure of social and political organisation throughout Polynesia, with the exception of Samoa, Futuna, Uvea, which were characterized by a so-called descent-line system, and a few atolls. The shape of the conical pyramid was widespread, so to speak, only its nodes were somewhat looser or somewhat tighter.

Although Sahlins (1985a: 20) later repealed his earlier characterization of East Polynesian societies, such as Hawai’i, as conical, the geometrical metaphor of cone proved really appealing. It implies an interpretation of hierarchy in which ‘the rank of any individual is governed by his or her relative distance from the main line of the descent in the group, the high chief being the direct descendant of the deified founder of the community’ (Sahlins 1958: 251). Thus, senior chiefs are always on top, followed by junior descendants and their offspring in succession. Anthropologists and archaeologists who are structurally minded still consider this contribution to Polynesian studies as seminal (see Hage & Harary 1996: 90-124). Interestingly, however, Sahlins wrote about conical clans, as testified by his references to Kirchhoff and the graphic depiction of his model (Sahlins 1958: 143, figure 1), but for convenience sake he used the concept of ‘ramage’, which he considered ‘more descriptive than Kirchhoff’s’ and because it was ‘already widely known’ (*ibid.* 140). Since this term is a very different metaphor to describe socio-political organisation than the conical clan, and also because it became the standard concept for the central kingroup in Maori society, it is necessary to discuss it in more detail.

Ramage

The concept of ramage was coined by Raymond Firth in his classic monograph *We, the Tikopia*, originally published in 1936. His interest in the concept was ethnographic rather than theoretical as he noted that in many Polynesian societies the unity of kinship groupings is expressed by ‘unilateral recognition of common descent’ (1957a: 327). Firth proposed the botanical metaphor of ‘ramage’ to credit in his view the most important feature of these kingroups: ‘the principle of fission and dispersion in the creation of them’:

... they have arisen through the branching and re-branching of the family structure, acquiring greater autonomy and independence the further they move away from the parent stem. The tree metaphor is actually used by some native peoples in describing their social organization. Here, very often, great importance is attached to seniority as a principle of social differentiation. One term which might be employed to characterize such kinship groups is ‘ramage’,

for which there is literary authority, though it has now fallen out of use. This term has the advantage of suggesting immediately by its etymology the branching process by which these groups attain individuality and yet keep their connection with the parent stem. It is also consistent in metaphor with the expression 'genealogical tree.' The process can be correctly described as one of ramification (Firth 1957*a* [1936]: 327-8).

The concept of ramage proved particularly important in the debate about the dynamics of kinship organisations, that in the Pacific was mainly held within the terms of a theory of progressive segmentation. In his doctoral dissertation on the New Zealand Maori, for example, Firth (1959 [1929]: 111-14) had represented the evolution of extended families into sub-tribal groupings, while he also described the subdivision of minor sub-tribes from major sub-tribes, which to some extent implied a historical reconstruction of the formation of Maori tribal organisations. In 1957, however, he rejected the assumption that the segmentary structure of Maori society resulted from progression over time. Instead, he argued that in any explanation of the evolution of Maori tribal organisations their structural dynamics could not be denied, the fact that minor segments could wax while major segments could wane (Firth 1957*b*: 7). A simultaneous development of kinship groupings on both similar and different ranks of the social order he believed was more obvious, and for this purpose the concept of ramage was applied to Maori society.

Although he did not himself use the concept of ramage, the botanical metaphor of the boughs or branches of a tree for the segmentary structure of Polynesian lineages was introduced by Edward Gifford in his famous monograph on *Tongan Society* (1929). Gifford characterized the structure of Tongan lineages (*ha'a*), all patrilineal, as

... a tree with trunk, limbs, branches, and twigs. Here and there a twig develops into a branch...; other twigs sprout forth and die... Or perhaps a limb becomes huge and flourishing..., while the trunk... ceases to flourish. Everything points to the necessity of a line of powerful chiefs for a nucleus about which the lineage groups itself. Without such chiefs it appears to wilt and die and its membership gradually aligns itself with other rising lineages (Gifford 1929: 30).

Gifford also described branching processes in terms of the splitting of 'major lineages' into 'minor ones' and the development of minor lineages into 'incipient major lineages' (*ibid.*), but it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the relevance of his contribution to the interpretation of the evolution of

Polynesian socio-political organisation. What interests me here in particular is the trope of tree.

The image of a tree was a widespread taxonomic device for secular, religious and scientific purposes in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, including the graphic depiction of a 'pedigree', which originally has been derived from the French *pie de grue* or 'crane's foot'. The conceptual distinction between 'pedigree' and 'genealogy' was first made by Willem Rivers in 1910, who thus created the possibility of the methodological transition from the realm of personal names to the abstract system of genealogical relationships underlying those names (Bouquet 1996). The visual aspect of the genealogical diagram made the underlying metaphor of tree more universally applicable.

It is also important to make explicit the connotations of the trope of tree since its choice as a symbol to metaphorize kinship relations is probably not merely decorative. Bouquet (*ibid.* 59) refers to the homology in Indo-European etymology between the male body and the tree, which are both regarded as self-generative and self-perpetuating. The association between the spine of the male body (assumed to channel the movement of seed) and the trunk of the tree (medium for sap rising from the soil to the branches) leads to the concept of 'axial channel' which enables the tree to rise above time (*ibid.* 59-60). The genealogical diagram, as an anthropological representation of pedigree, accomplishes the same feat: it visualises the underlying structure of genealogical relationships that normally outlives 'ego' and her or his kinship connections.

In Polynesia the trope of tree is not only associated with growth and infinity, but it also evokes the connotation of chieftainship or leadership. In Polynesian mythology, Tane is a deified ancestor who symbolizes trees, forests, birds and insects, but also light since he alone succeeded to create light by separating his parents Rangi, the skyfather, and Papa, the earth mother. It was not a coincidence that he managed to split Heaven from Earth since he occupied an intermediary position as the so-called father of the trees, which are rooted in the earth, but reach up into the sky as well (Schwimmer 1966: 15). Birds also live largely in the realm between earth and sky.

As father of forests and everything that inhabit them or that are constructed from trees, Tane could also be considered chief of chiefs. This may be inferred, among other things, from the fact that the *tapu* of the forest had to be preserved strictly. Thus, it was necessary to seek the aid of ritual specialists in order to propitiate the ancestor of the forest when a tree was felled to make a canoe or to build an ancestral community house. Both ancestral houses and

canoes were major symbols of chiefly authority. Ancestral houses are often named after a founding ancestor and were in the past mainly the house of the chief and his extended family (Van Meijl 1993). Canoes constitute the logical complement of the stump of the tree from which they have been carved. The relationship between canoe, symbol of mobility and rootlessness, and stump, symbol of stability and rootedness, is therefore a metaphor for the relationship between tribe and chief. In order to be kept under control, tribes need a chief, as canoes continue to require a stump to which they can be tied up when ashore (Van Meijl 1994). Being at the root of the tree from which canoes are carved, stumps invariably precede canoes and for that reason, too, they continue to play an essential role in the protection of the canoe.

The primacy of chiefly authority in the trope of tree is equivalent to the position of chiefs at the top in the metaphor of cone for Polynesian lineages. Both tropes imply a similar model of hierarchy in Polynesian socio-political organisation. This model of hierarchy may be described as either a ranked cone or a ramified tree in which a set of structural equivalents, such as older and younger siblings, chiefs and commoners, higher and lesser 'ramages' are all positioned on a continuous scale by means of the fundamental criterion of seniority of descent. The gradation of rank, however, is not simply a continuous progression since a qualitative disjunction is assumed to exist between chief and people, marked, among other things, by differential access to luxury items, by prescribed behaviour, and by distinctive ritual behaviour. The principle of seniority of descent which associates rank with proximity to the founding ancestor links Polynesian chiefs directly with deified ancestors or supernatural progenitors. Polynesian chiefs, then, have on the basis of the metaphors of cone and ramage long been regarded as high above the people or at the root of their 'ramages'. Even though it has always been recognized that Polynesian chiefdoms varied considerably in the degree to which differences in rank were formalized as distinct social strata, the underlying model of hierarchy has assumed to be applicable throughout the Pacific. However, since the metaphor of the model has largely preceded this interpretation, local variations in Polynesian hierarchy have, I argue, frequently been misunderstood. Below I will illustrate this argument with reference to Maori society which I here seek to analyse from the perspective of indigenous metaphors of hierarchy. My argument is that departing from indigenous metaphors of hierarchy might help to explain the ambiguity surrounding the structural hierarchy in some Polynesian societies, notably in that of the New Zealand Maori.

Socio-Political Organisation in Maori society

The Maori settled on the islands of New Zealand approximately 1000 years ago. In the course of time they multiplied and formed a society that was characterized by a complex structure of socio-political organisation. Over the years a *communis opinio* has emerged on a basic outline of Maori socio-political organisation. An ideal type of Maori socio-political organisation was first formulated by the New Zealand economist, later anthropologist, Raymond Firth (1959 [1929]) in his doctoral dissertation. Firth's model of Maori socio-political organisation has become authoritative among both European and Maori scholars (e.g. Ballara 1998, Buck 1949, Metge 1976, Kawharu 1977, Walker 1990 and Winiata 1967). Although some aspects of Firth's views have been criticized, particularly the lack of a historical perspective in his model (e.g. Van Meijl 1995, Webster 1998), his basic outline of Maori socio-political organisation has never been challenged and shall therefore be taken as point of departure for the following synopsis.

Kinship

According to Firth (1959 [1929]: 111) the smallest unit of Maori society was the *whaanau*, which term is commonly glossed as 'extended family'. *Whaanau* ranged through three or four generations and typically consisted of a man, his wife and their unmarried children, some of their married children (usually the sons), and the latter's spouses and children. Extended families often lived in unprotected villages called *kaainga*, which were generally located in close proximity to a tribal or sub-tribal stronghold (*paa*) in which they were allotted a separate section for sleeping, cooking and storing food and to which they moved in off-seasons as well as in times of war (Buck 1949: 137-40, 331-3; cf. Firth 1959 [1929]: 92, 113). Extended families exercised rights to land and its products and the apportionment of food was largely managed at their level. All in all, extended families managed their own social and economic affairs except when those affected village or (sub-)tribal policy (*ibid.* 111).

Firth (1959 [1929]: 111-2) pointed out that over the years many *whaanau* extended into kinship groups of the clan-type. As *whaanau* increased in numbers some groups were assumed to separate themselves after which they developed into autonomous *whaanau* while maintaining close links with their relations. The blood ties between members of different *whaanau* were expressed through the concept of *hapuu*. These kinship groupings occupied a common territory and defined itself by descent from an apical, often eponymous ancestor who had lived several generations ago.

As several *whaanau* constituted a *hapuu*, several *hapuu* made up a group linked together by descent of a relatively remote founder ancestor (Firth 1959 [1929]: 114). Groups at this level were called *iwi*, which also indicates a

relation of common descent. However, Firth (*ibid.* 139) argued that political and economic functions of *iwi* were restricted to an all-embracing over-right to the land within its borders. Its articulation as a kinship grouping stemmed according to him largely from the organisation of lavish feasts. Firth did not elaborate on the distinction between politico-economic and social functions of *iwi*, but the increasing importance of land following the wars of the 1820s and the alienation of land by European settlers probably contributed to his putting *iwi* at the core of his model.

The highest level of the tribal structure was, in the perspective set out by Firth (1959 [1929]: 115-6), formed by the *waka*, the ‘canoe’, consisting of various *iwi* which had emerged from ancestors who had reached the shores of Aotearoa in the same canoe. However, no co-operative form of government existed among them. They were purely based on the belief of common descent from the same ancestor(s). Descent thus was the root principle of the social organisation of Maori society.

Figure 1.

Kingroup terminology

<u>Maori term</u>	-	<u>Kingroup term</u>
<i>Whaanau</i>	-	extended family
<i>Hapuu</i>	-	ramage
<i>Iwi</i>	-	clan
<i>Waka</i>		phratry

Kinship Rules and Terms

Firth further described the dominant principles of the tribal organisation of Maori society as ambilateral affiliation and ambilineal descent. Approximately thirty years after his doctoral research he explained that he had introduced the term ambilateral as against bilateral to indicate that in Maori society affiliation was optative and that use of both parents was not automatic or necessary (Firth 1957*b*: 5; 1963: 32). He had called Maori *hapuu* ambilateral groups since both mother and father were eligible for kinship affiliation (Firth 1959 [1929]: 112). If the parents were of the same *hapuu*, children had a double qualification for affiliation to the *hapuu*. If the parents were of different *hapuu*, the children could affiliate to two *hapuu*. By the same token, males and females could figure in the same genealogical line. *Hapuu* were frequently composed of persons tracing their descent through a line of mixed male and female links. To describe this optative mechanism ‘for the maintenance of group continuity through the generations by using male or female links without set order’, Firth (1957 *b*: 6) proposed the term ambilineal.

In his published doctoral dissertation Firth (1959 [1929]: 112-3) hesitated to follow the custom of labelling the *hapuu* a 'clan', because in anthropology the term is normally reserved for exogamous, unilineal groups, while *hapuu* are ambilineal and practically endogamous. In addition, clans are commonly understood to be made up of several lineages, while *hapuu* are not. In his discussion of Polynesian descent groups in the late 1950s and early 1960s, therefore, Firth no longer defined the Maori *hapuu* at the same level as clan. He introduced the term 'ramage' to distinguish the Maori *hapuu* and other restricted ambilateral kin groups from unilineal descent groups generally referred to as lineages (*ibid.* 1957b: 6; 1963: 32). It is interesting to note here that this concept surreptitiously implied a specific view of hierarchy in Maori society that did not directly correspond with indigenous metaphors. In particular when the model and metaphor of ramage is extended from social organisation to political organisation this is rather problematic, which I will elaborate below.

In contrast to ramage or ramified lineages, clans are units of a higher order at which common descent is still assumed but all genealogical connections cannot necessarily be demonstrated (Fox 1967: 49). Although the concept of clan is generally reserved for unilineal descent groupings, for lack of a better term 'clan' may be used in reference to the Maori concept of *iwi*. The *waka*, a cluster of several 'clans' combined into a single grouping, may accordingly be termed a 'phratry' (*cf.* Keesing 1975: 31).

Chieftainship (or Leadership?)

In Firth's view (1959 [1929]: 106) descent not only structured the social organisation of Maori society, but also its political organisation. Maori political organisation was argued to parallel Maori social organisation. The position of chiefs in the hierarchical order of political organisation in Maori society was constructed as corresponding linearly to the structure of kinship groupings. Chiefs of higher rank were represented as drawing together a multitude of lower ranking chiefs and their followers, until all were encompassed and the aspired unity of the entire political alliance was achieved. While Firth set out the guidelines for this view of Maori political organisation, it was elaborated by the Maori anthropologist Maharaia Winiata (1956). For other Polynesian societies the same parallel between social and political organisation was drawn by Marshall Sahlins (1968: 24), when he refined his interpretation of the conical clan as the model of social organisation for political leadership in Polynesia.

The 'paramount chief' in Maori society was called the *ariki*. In his pedigree the senior lines of all tribal genealogies converged. Hence he was recognised as the head of the *iwi*. Senior *ariki* were in some situations distinguished as head of the *waka*. The chief of the *hapuu* or the *rangatira*

ranked lower than the paramount chief since he descended along junior lines. The head of the extended family was the *kaumaatua* or ‘(respected) elder’, recognised on account of his offspring as well as his age, wisdom and life-experience (Winiata 1967: 25-42).

Figure 2

Kingroup and leadership position

<i>waka</i>	-	senior <i>ariki</i>
<i>iwi</i>	-	<i>ariki</i>
<i>hapuu</i>	-	<i>rangatira</i>
<i>whaanau</i>	-	<i>kaumaatua</i>

Over the years this model of Maori socio-political organisation has become classic, but its association with a specific interpretation of hierarchy as structured from the top downwards or from the root upwards, which has been derived from the influential metaphors of conical clan and ramage have, to my knowledge, never been noted. As a corollary, the important assumption regarding the so-called segmented structure of hierarchy in which either the top or the bottom was viewed as prime junction of the entire society has never been addressed, even though it underlay the development of this model of Maori social and political organisation by Raymond Firth and its further expansion by particularly Peter Buck and Maharaia Winiata. It goes without saying, therefore, that an epistemological reflection on the theoretical implications of this model and its metaphors is long overdue.

Interpreting Maori Metaphors

The main problem with the interpretation of hierarchy in Maori society arises from the translation of vernacular Maori concepts of socio-political organisation. Since Firth it has become accepted to translate the Maori concept of *iwi*, literally ‘bone’ or ‘people’, as ‘tribe’. The term ‘tribe’, however, suggests it constituted the core of Maori society and normally it also implies a coherence that exceeded the affinal ties within *iwi*, at least until well after colonial contact began. It is now widely assumed that the composition of tribes, both in pre- and post-contact years, used to be rather disjunct and flexible. As corporate groups *iwi* are even likely to be a post-colonial development (Ballara 1998).

Since the beginning of this century the translation of two other Maori concepts of social organisation has also been derived from the current translation of *iwi* as ‘tribe’. *Hapuu* is usually glossed as ‘sub-tribe’, even though Firth himself consistently used *hapuu* in the Maori vernacular, while *waka*, or ‘canoe’, is usually represented as ‘super-tribe’. However, both are quite

inaccurate characterizations of the forms of Maori organisations they are supposed to express.

Figure 3

Translations of Maori kingroups

<u>Maori term</u>	<u>Usual translation</u>	<u>Literal translation</u>
<i>Whaanau</i>	extended family	‘to give birth’
<i>Hapuu</i>	sub-tribe	‘pregnancy’
<i>Iwi</i>	tribe	‘bone(s)’; ‘people’
<i>Waka</i>	super-tribe	‘canoe’

Waka invariably appear to have operated as loosely structured confederations of tribes, between which the link was probably more sentimental than political (Van Meijl 1995). As early as 1949 Buck (1949: 336) even suggested that *waka* are likely to have been galvanized by post-colonial developments as well. Against this background the concept of ‘super-tribe’ seems a gross exaggeration of the symbolic meaning of *waka* in social and political practices.

The term ‘sub-tribe’ is also a misleading translation of *hapuu* as it suggests that it concerns a mere sub-group of a larger encompassing ‘tribe’ (Metge 1986: 37). However, the *hapuu* is likely to have been the central unit of social action in Maori society as nineteenth century ethnography shows that members of the same *hapuu* did not only live in or around a common fortified village, but also that they worked together for most purposes, both economic and ceremonial (Best 1941 [1924], I: 338ff.; Firth 1959 [1929]: 113). The central position of *hapuu* in Maori society is reflected in the literal meaning of *hapuu* as ‘pregnancy’, which primarily represents the idea of birth from a common ancestor (Buck 1949: 333). At the same time, however, the literal meaning of ‘pregnancy’ also expresses a ‘genesis from within’ and thus indicates the precedence of the *hapuu* over other groups (cf. Schwimmer 1978: 211; 1990).

In this context, it is interesting that other vernacular Maori concepts of social organisation are also based on metaphors of birth and growth, which is relevant for the interpretation of the inter-relationships between the various groupings. The literal meaning of the concept of *whaanau*, for example, is ‘to give birth’, while *iwi* should be translated literally as ‘bone(s)’ or ‘people’. In consequence of the original meaning of these vernacular concepts it may be argued that *hapuu* probably ‘carried’ a responsibility for all their members, including all *whaanau* members who were affiliated to it. The literal meanings

of ‘pregnancy’ (*hapuu*) and ‘to give birth’ (*whaanau*) clarify in other words the centrality or precedence of *hapuu* in the social organisation of Maori society.

Indeed, departing from the metaphors associated with the vernacular concepts used to express various kinship clusters in Maori society generates a different structure of the socio-political hierarchy. It is not necessarily anchored at the top, as in the conical clan, or rooted at the bottom, as in the metaphor of ramage, but instead it is constructed from a central point in the middle from which it develops outwardly. People are conceived in *hapuu*, born in *whaanau*, which in turn engender *iwi* or related ‘people’, who collectively travel on the same *waka* or ‘canoe’.

This model of Maori social organisation is paralleled by a similar model of political organisation that in the vernacular is also mainly expressed through metaphors related to birth and growth. Thus, it is interesting to note that the concept of *ariki* in Proto-Oceanic language meant literally ‘little one’ or ‘the little person’, while it referred specifically to the first-born son of the A-raha, literally ‘great one’ or ‘the big person’ (Pawley 1982: 40). The concept of *rangatira*, on the other hand, is according to Williams (1971 [1844]) derived from *ranga*, literally ‘to raise’, ‘to cast up’, ‘to set in motion’ or ‘to perform’; and *tira*, meaning a ‘file (of men)’, a ‘row’ or a ‘company of travellers’. *Rangatira*, then, is the only exception to the use of birth metaphors for positions in Maori socio-political organisations. Its literal meaning, however, is not less significant since it reflects the organising tasks of so-called secondary ‘chiefs’ and thus simultaneously exemplifies that status in Maori society was not only ascribed by birth, but also had to be achieved (see further below). The literal meaning of *rangatira* is also consistent with ethnohistorical evidence which suggests that *rangatira* not only held authority and control, but also had responsibilities, duties and obligations. For that reason, too, it has already been suggested in another context that the received translation of ‘chief’ is not correct, and that the term could perhaps better be translated as ‘leader’ (Waitangi Tribunal 1998: 214). The etymology of the third type of leader in Maori society is again directly related to the metaphors of birth and growth underlying most other terms: *kaumaatuu* literally means ‘grown up’, ‘adult’, ‘old man or woman’. Hence, *kaumatua* were traditionally not junior chiefs but they were distinguished in extended families as *pater familias*.

My argument now is that these metaphors clarify why in the office of Maori chiefs no autocratic power resided, compared to the absolute rule of chiefs in other Polynesian societies, such as Hawai’i, Fiji, Tonga and the Society Islands. In those countries the chief was a kind of ‘stranger-king’ who stood outside or above society (Sahlins 1985a: 73-103), while Maori chiefs

were first and foremost seen as representatives of the people or simply as leaders of tribal communities in external affairs (Sahlins 1985*b*). The balanced authority of Maori chiefs and leaders has long been misunderstood since the metaphors of conical clan and ramage were underlying the interpretation of hierarchy in New Zealand. The structure of hierarchy in Maori society is, however, relatively ambiguous and its dynamics are far from unilineal /1/.

Ambiguity and Maori Hierarchy

In Maori ideology one of the main principles of organisation was primogeniture, usually in the male line. It guided the hierarchical ranking of kinship groupings, for example, as segments of the tribal organisation were ranked according to the position of the patriarch in relation to his brothers. As the older always ranked above the younger, so the descendants of the older ranked above those of the younger. By the same token, senior chiefs had a higher status than junior chiefs. This structure of hierarchy was not unlike other Polynesian societies, but in New Zealand it was qualified in various ways.

Although in Maori society senior descent was undoubtedly the most important precondition for leadership, the optative kinship system, in which affiliation and descent could pass through ambilateral and ambilineal lines, offered ample opportunities to manipulate genealogies. It provided those of junior rank with avenues to climb the ladder of leaders of senior ranking descent groups and overcome their inherited inferiority. Thus leadership in Maori society cannot simply be characterized as based on ascription (Mahuika 1977). For ascribed rank to be translated into effective political influence, high ranking chiefs had to demonstrate personal skills: lower ranking chiefs could outdo them.

Achievement also complemented the principles of birth and sex in the establishment of social grades in traditional Maori society. Those of chiefly descent were termed *rangatira*, in this context meaning 'aristocrats' /2/. Those of junior rank or whose ancestors had diminished their prestige were regarded as 'commoners' (*ware* or *tuutuuaa*). The social differentiation between those of chiefly descent and men of lower rank, however, was not marked in a salient way. The aristocrats were set off from the rest of society predominantly to direct and guide, rather than to rule. The organizing tasks of aristocrats and chiefs is reflected in the original meaning of *rangatira* as mentioned above: 'to set in motion - a file of men'. The restricted authority of aristocrats over the so-called commoners can in part also be explained by the genealogical connections between them, entailing the usual rights and mutual obligations of kin (Winiata 1967: 29). They also implied that all commoners could claim to be related, in some degree, to the ones of chiefly rank. Best [1941, I: 346] even remarked that

during his long contact with the Tuhoe people he never met a Maori who would admit that he belonged to the class of commoners /3/.

Slaves no doubt held the lowest status of all. Most slaves were captives in times of war and very often their capture was undertaken to solve a labour problem. Although the physical condition of slaves was not abysmal, they were under the control of the chiefs (Winiata 1967: 29-30). As such, it was the worst fate that could befall one. Slaves were outcasts and they did not even enter into the social grades of a tribe. The stigma attached to slavery was very severe. However, slavery in pre-European Maori society should not be exaggerated as slaves were apparently few in number (Vayda 1960: 107).

In summary, then, it can be said that, on the one hand, the socio-political organisation in traditional Maori society was distinctly hierarchical. Both in the order of kinship and in the political organisation, lower levels of the hierarchical structure were encompassed in higher ranking segments which supposedly re-united the kinship groupings of a more junior status and their respective chiefs. The culmination of all dimensions of socio-political organisation in the ultimate position of paramount chief, made him a potentially powerful figure in tribal politics.

All ethnographic and historical analyses of Maori political organisation have shown, on the other hand, that the power of paramount chiefs was relatively limited (Winiata 1967). Chiefs not only had to achieve and actualize the potentiality for power ascribed to them by birth, but the authority of chiefs also came more from the group than from the chiefs' position in the hierarchical structure. In New Zealand the authority of tribes was vested in chiefs, but the *mana* common to kinship groups and their land was only represented by a chief insofar as it extended back into the land and his tribe (Johansen 1954: 90-1). For that reason, too, the structural authority of paramount chiefs was countered by a subaltern view portraying them simply as tribal representatives in order to ensure that chiefs would not become detached from their tribal communities. This anti-hierarchical ideology, in turn, was reinforced by the fact that in the structural hierarchy of Maori socio-political organisation all lower ranking kinship groupings and their respective chiefs retained their autonomy (Walker 1987: 155-6). Thus, there can be no doubt that Maori chiefs were far from absolute rulers. The concept of *rangatiratanga*, often (mis-)translated as 'chieftainship', would indeed be rendered more accurately as 'authority' (Waitangi Tribunal 1988: 174).

The ambivalent relationship between chiefs and tribes has been expressed poignantly in a saying about the metaphors of stump and the canoe: *ko te tumu herenga waka*, 'it is the stump to which the canoe is tied' (see also Van Meijl

1994). As canoes are valued more highly than stumps, tribes, too, are commonly valued more highly than chiefs, and the aphorism is usually cited to emphasize that the chief is merely an extension of the tribe. Thus the high status of chiefs above tribes in the hierarchical organisation of Maori society, is inverted in an anti-hierarchical ideology. The analogy between chief and stump implies that the structural status of chiefs ranks unequivocally above that of tribal communities, but Maori interpretations of the aphorism illustrate that the superior ranking of chiefs coexists with a representation of the relationship between chiefs and tribes as one in which tribes are believed to be in full command of their chiefly representatives. Not infrequently the relationship between chiefs and tribes is even viewed as an asymmetrical alliance in which tribes command their chiefs. The popular interpretation of the dictum of the stump and the canoe illustrates this insofar as it opposes the superior ranking of chiefs.

In view of the co-existence of a structural hierarchy with an anti-hierarchical ideology the socio-political organisation of Maori society could be described, following Dumont (1980: 239), as characterized by 'the encompassing of the contrary' /4/. The socio-political structure of Maori society is segmented into an hierarchy of tribal groupings and chiefs, the senior ones of which structurally encompass the lower ranking units and chiefs. In contradistinction to the metaphor of conical clan and its pyramidal model of hierarchical stratification, however, lower ranking units retain, to some extent, their independence in spite of their encompassment at higher levels. The relative autonomy of lower ranking tribes and chiefs within the encompassing hierarchy, in turn, allows the development of an anti-hierarchical ideology in which junior chiefs and their communities rather than senior chiefs are in command. The ideology of egalitarianism functions to balance the structural asymmetry between chiefs and tribes, although hierarchical values ultimately prevail over the anti-hierarchical ideology. Tribal communities may be able to put some reciprocal restraints on the power of chiefs, but the anti-hierarchical ideology which is developed at the lower levels of the hierarchical organisation is not structurally anchored. Contrary viewpoints may be developed but remain encompassed, so to speak, and therefore Dumont's view of hierarchy provides an adequate description of Maori socio-political organisation.

Dumont has elaborated his axiom of 'the encompassing of the contrary' exclusively with reference to relationships of opposition, e.g purity-impurity, priest-king, status-power, male-female, left-right. His concept of encompassment might therefore not at first sight concur with the part-whole relationship between lower and higher ranking tribes and chiefs in Maori

society, in which the lower echelons remain independent in some situations. For that reason, it is important to point out that Dumont (*ibid.* 240) has described the phrase ‘the contrary’ ambiguously as either ‘distinct from the set’ or ‘in opposition to it’, thus leaving open the possibility of a mere distinction between elements and ensemble. This interpretation makes it also suitable for the analysis of the inherently ambiguous form of Maori hierarchy. In Maori society inferior levels of the hierarchical organisation were normally distinguished as autonomous units, but in line with the anti-hierarchical ideology they could also be opposed to their superior levels, for example, in the exceptional circumstances of warfare or severe economic competition. Thus, autonomy in one context could coexist with opposition in another.

Dumont’s model of hierarchy as a form of encompassment of the contrary appears appropriate since it provides a metaphor that describes the ambivalent relationship between lower and higher ranking kingroups in Maori society, as well as between junior and senior chiefs, more adequately than the metaphors of conical clan and ramage. The problem with these latter metaphors is their assumption of a unilineal relationship between top and bottom, or, alternatively, between root and stem, in spite of the branches. A unilineal analysis of Maori socio-political organisation, however, only partially represents internal relationships between lower and higher ranking kingroups and chiefs. After all, in practice internal relationships are not only streamlined from the top of the cone or the root of the stem, but at the same time they are countered by oppositional streams from the bottom of the cone back towards the top or from the top of the tree back to the stump. And these contradicting tendencies are to be taken into account in order to explain the inherent ambiguity in Maori hierarchy.

Another reason why Dumont’s model of hierarchy as encompassment of the contrary is suitable for the analysis of Maori socio-political organisation is intertwined with the similarity between his metaphor and the Maori metaphors on the basis of which hierarchy is structured. Encompassment and pregnancy are both constructed around the notion of envelopment. In addition, it seems obvious that ‘pregnancy’ is not infinitive and therefore logically followed by ‘birth’, and consecutively, by ‘bones’ or ‘people’, who, in turn, may become pregnant again. The circularity that is an inherent part of Maori metaphors of birth and growth concerning Maori social and political organisation evokes not only the association of continuity but also of communication between people that is not only one-sided. Contrasting views do have a chance to emerge and be expressed, even though they may be absorbed or encompassed. Their mere

existence, however, makes for internal relationships that are intrinsically and perpetually ambiguous.

The interpretation of Maori hierarchy as ambiguous, as circular, as encompassing the contrary, is also reflected in the conception of unity or *kotahitanga*, literally ‘oneness’, that was constructed to keep the confederated ‘canoes’ together (Metge 1976: 71). After all, the Maori conception of unity does not necessarily involve the blotting out of all differences, which is exemplified in the constitution of kinship groupings. In the step-by-step model of social organisation different *whaanau* united in one *hapuu* apropos other *hapuu*, while different *hapuu* converged in one tribe apropos other tribes, up to the echelon of the *waka*, but within the all-encompassing tribal confederation each group retained its own autonomy. Likewise lower ranking chiefs were outstripped by senior chiefs, but never at the expense of their autonomous rule over their own kinship groups. Metge (*ibid.* xii-xiii) has therefore argued that in the Maori worldview ‘unity and diversity do not necessarily contradict and at best involve each other: unity discovered in diversity, diversity transcended in unity’.

The coexistence of unity in the higher ranks and diversity in the lower ranks of the hierarchical structure of organisation is also expressed in the metaphor *rautahi*, “‘an hundred” (*rau*) and “one” (*tahi*)’, ‘many yet also one’. The notion of *rautahi* is often cited as a charter, not only for internal relationships within Maori tribes or even within Maoridom at large, but also between all Maoris and Europeans within New Zealand (*ibid.* xii). In this sense the Maori conception of unity is strikingly similar to Dumont’s conception of hierarchy in terms of encompassment of the contrary. In Maori society lower segments of the kinship organisation are not simply included at higher levels, as according to the classical models of segmentary stratification based on the metaphors of cone or ramage. Maori kinship units, instead, are included in the confederated canoes, while they remain simultaneously excluded and develop an anti-hierarchical ideology to substantiate their claims to autonomy. By the same token, junior chiefs never lose their independence over certain matters directly related to their kingroup, not even to paramount chiefs.

Concluding Remarks

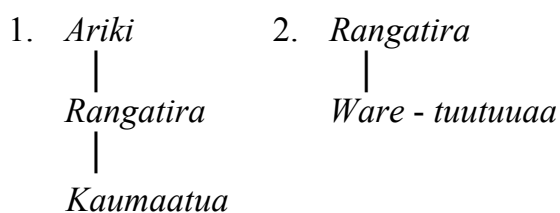
In this paper I have demonstrated that hierarchy in Maori society has long been misunderstood since it was analysed as a Polynesian society that on the basis of a typology of leadership was contrasted with Melanesian societies. The stereotype of leadership in Polynesia was expressed through the metaphor of conical clan or ramage, in which seniority of descent classified senior chiefs at the top of the cone or the root of the tree. These metaphors, however, did not

leave sufficient space to take into account that hierarchy in Maori society is rather ambiguous, that lower ranking groups and chiefs retain their autonomy and may therefore develop views that sometimes oppose higher ranking groups or paramount chiefs. This ambiguity may be done justice in anthropological analysis when the analysis of socio-political organisation departs not from etic metaphors that are embedded in academic discourses, but from metaphors that are associated with indigenous concepts expressing kinship and leadership. Then it appears that the dynamics of Maori socio-political organisation are not initiated at the top or the bottom, but in the middle. Chiefs did not stand at any side, neither above nor below, but as ‘first-born’ or ‘little ones’ they were encompassed by their surrounding communities. As Oppenheim (1973: 105) phrased it, chiefs ‘did not stand at the apex of a hierarchy of command but rather in the position of *primus inter pares*’. For that reason, too, leader would be a better term than chief. Their position was similar to the leader of a Maori ‘culture group’ performing traditional Maori arts. Normally they are part of the group. Only to ensure a simultaneous rhythm of the group or to speak out on their behalf occasionally a cultural leader may briefly step aside. Another apt metaphor to express this delicate relationship may be provided by the Russian nesting dolls, the *matriosjkas*. The *ariki*, the ‘little one’, is best represented by the smallest puppet inside since without the surrounding larger puppets the tiniest has no right of existence.

NOTES

/1/ A similar argument has been made by Glenn Petersen (1999) for the Caroline Islands, but he develops his point in a very different manner, that is without reference to Dumont and his notion of encompassment. His interpretation of the conical clan in Micronesia was, moreover, criticized by Hage (2000)

/2/ *Rangatira* is a relational term. On the one hand, *rangatira* is to be understood in relation to *ariki* and *kaumaatua*, both being leaders on an upper and a lower level respectively (1). On the other hand, *rangatira* must be conceived of as the class of aristocrats in a dominant relationship to the ‘commoners’ (2).



/3/ Likewise, the arch-missionary Samuel Marsden observed that Maori society only comprised two classes, rangatira and slaves (Elder 1932: 118). See also Goldman (1970: 42-3).

/4/ The Maori form of hierarchy has also been recognized as one of 'encompassment' by Schrempp (1985: 26). See also Marcus (1989: 191).

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